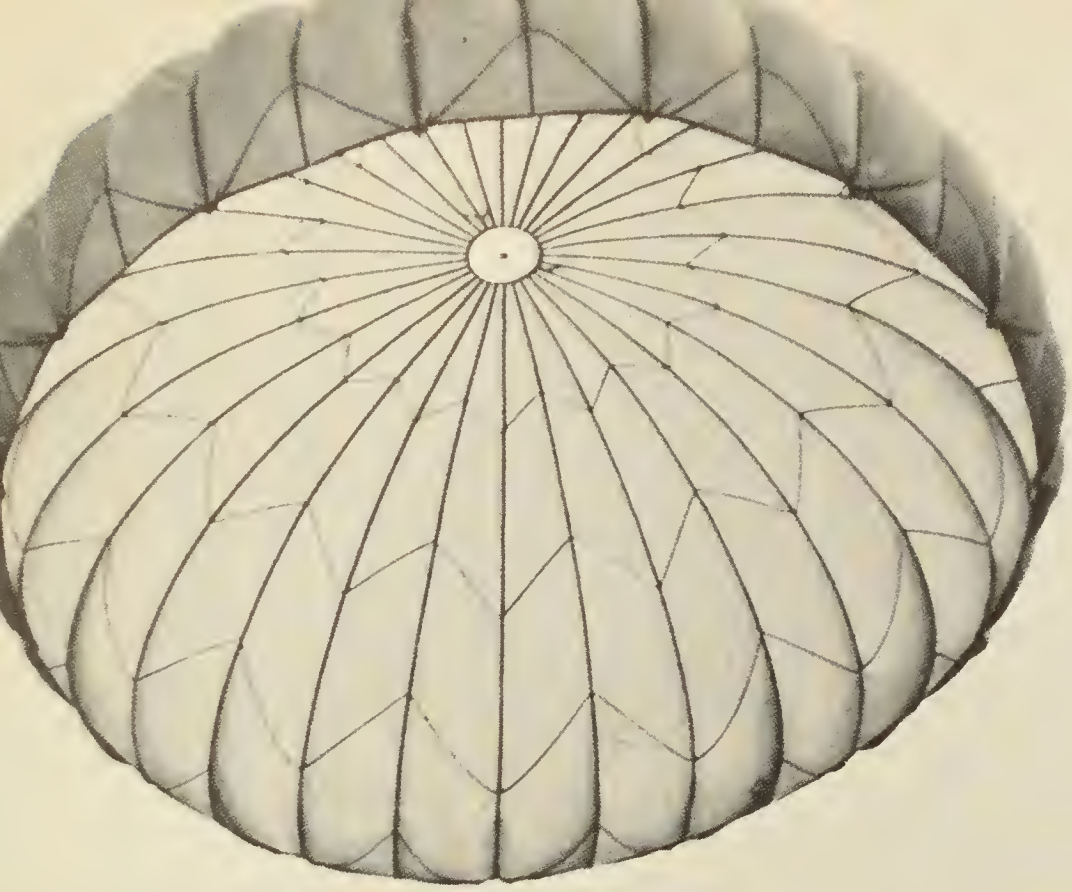
These are the times that try men's souls. The Summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country, but he that stands it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like Hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheaply we esteem too lightly; it is dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as freedom shoud not be highly rated.

—Thomas Paine

vietnam—
the fourth year



vietnam—the fourth year

march '68–february '69

a pictorial history of the 173d airborne brigade

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Prepared by the Public Information Office, 173d Airborne Brigade, APO San Francisco 96250, as the fourth in a series of authorized annual publications designed to relate the activities of the Brigade. Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army.

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in memoriam

The muffled drum's sad roll has beat
The soldier's last tattoo;
No more on Life's parade shall meet
The brave and fallen few.
On Fame's eternal camping-ground
Their silent tents are spread,
And Glory guards, with solemn round
The bivouac of the dead.

—Theodore O'Hara

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commanders

brigadier general richard j. allen

General Allen assumed command of the 173d Airborne Brigade on March 20, 1968, just 10 days prior to the Brigade's move to Bong Son. His previous Vietnam assignments had been as assistant division commander of the 1st Infantry Division and then the 101st Airborne Division.

He enlisted in the Army in July of 1940 and advanced to the rank of first sergeant before attending OCS and receiving his commission in the infantry in 1942.

During World War II, he served with the 101st Airborne and participated in the invasion of Normandy, the invasion of Holland and the Battle of Bastogne.

Among his decorations are the Silver Star, Bronze Star, Legion of Merit, and the Combat Infantryman's Badge.

General Barnes assumed command of the 173d Airborne Brigade on December 15, 1968. He came to the Brigade from a post as Deputy Senior Advisor for the II Corps Tactical Zone.

He received his commission in the Corps of Engineers after graduating from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1942. He also received a master's degree in aeronautical engineering from the California Institute of Technology in 1946.

During World War II, he served with the 51st Engineers, which he helped to cadre and train in the U.S. prior to its deployment in December, 1943 to the European Theater.

Among his decorations are the Legion of Merit, the Soldier's Medal, Bronze Star and the Army Commendation Medal.

brigadier general john w. barnes

history

Fighting the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese regulars requires a highly mobile combat force, able to adapt to an elusive enemy on his own grounds and conduct successful operations on the coastal plains, rice paddies, dense jungles and rugged mountains of Vietnam. The 173d Airborne Brigade has proved to be just such a unit.

The Brigade was born as a result of the marriage between the 173d Infantry Brigade and the 2nd Airborne Battle Group, 503d Infantry Combat Team on Okinawa on June 25, 1963. It was designed as the U.S. Army's hard-hitting, flexible strike force for the Pacific and the Far East.

For the next three years, the 173d trained hard on its home island of Okinawa and throughout the Asian Theater. Extensive airborne, guerilla and jungle warfare exercises in the Philippines, Taiwan, Korea and Thailand, honed the unit to the razor edge of combat readiness.

It was the admiring Chinese population on Taiwan, where the Brigade underwent airborne training with the Nationalist Chinese Army, that gave the paratroopers the name, "Tien Bing," or "Sky Soldiers." It stuck and has since been made the unofficial nickname for the soldiers of the 173d Airborne Brigade.

When the unit deployed to Vietnam in May, 1965 as the first Army combat unit to arrive in country, it was probably the most combat ready American unit ever to enter an armed conflict.

Upon arrival, the Brigade defended and secured Bien Hoa Air Base while conducting patrolling and clearing operations in the northern Mekong Delta and War Zone D. Ever since its first big action north of the Dong Nai River where they trapped a main force VC regiment and killed 400, the 173d earned a reputation for itself as a reaction force that deployed to wherever the fighting was the heaviest.

Two missions, however, stand out from all the rest. The

first occured during February 1967, when the 2nd Battalion made the first combat jump in 15 years to spearhead Operation Junction City. After the parachute assault deep into War Zone C near the Cambodian border and a massive helilift of the other battalions, the 173d swept its area of responsibility, killing 266 enemy and destroying an important Viet Cong propaganda office.

The second was the capture of Hill 875 near Dak To during the largest and most celebrated single battle of the Vietnam War. After 20 continuous days of fighting around Dak To, Brigade elements locked horns with an entrenched NVA regiment, and in the most bitter fighting of the war, captured the hill on Thanksgiving Day, 1967. Over 800 enemy were killed during the battle.

It was also in November that the 173d's rear elements moved from Bien Hoa to An Khe, the Brigade's present basecamp, in order to provide better support to the combat troops which were all operating in II Corps.

For almost the first three years in Vietnam, however, the Brigade had been looking for a "home of its own", its own TAOR (Tactical Area of Responsibility). This opportunity came in March, 1968, when the 173d replaced elements of the 4th Infantry division in the Bong Son area and began Operation Cochise/Dan Sinh.

Also conducting Operation Bolling II/Dan Hoa in the Tuy Hoa area and Operation Walker around An Khe, the Brigade assumed responsibility for the wealthy, heavily-populated provinces of Binh Dinh, Phu Yen and Phu Bon.

The 173d is still considered a reaction force, however, as evidenced when the 4th Battalion was deployed to Ban Me Thout in August to help stave off a threat from the 1st NVA division.

During its brief history, the 173d Airborne Brigade has undoubtedly become, in the words of General William Westmoreland, "one of the finest units in the history of the American Fighting Man."

units

503d infantry

The 173d Airborne Brigade's four battalions of the 503d Infantry have inherited the traditions of the oldest and one of the most famous parachute regiments in the United States Army.

On March 2, 1942, three parachute battalions were combined and redesignated as the 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment and sent to Ft. Bragg, N.C., for training. The 2nd Battalion, however, was detached and transferred to England. Later designated the 2nd Battalion, 509th Infantry, it made the first battalion-sized combat jump in the Army.

In October, the 503d deployed to Australia for more extensive training for combat operations in the Pacific Theater. The 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry, was meanwhile redesignated the 2nd Battalion, 503d Infantry and joined the regiment in training in Australia.

In July 1943, the 503d moved to Port Moresby, New Guinea, and on September 5, the regiment was air assaulted over Markham Valley on New Guinea's northeastern coast to engage entrenched Japanese forces. This was the first airborne operation of U.S. forces in the Pacific. After two weeks of fighting, the Japanese were defeated and the 503d was reassembled for the return to Australia.

The regiment's next jump was made by the 1st Battalion on the thickly-jungled island of Noemfoor off the northern coast of New Guinea in July. Shielded by a thick smoke screen, some of the planes dropped their sticks at an altitude of 175 feet for the lowest jump on record. The 3d Battalion jumped on a semi-secured air strip the next day to help the allies take the island in three weeks of vicious fighting.

The combat-hardened paratroopers were then ready to make their renowned jump on the fortress island of Corregidor in the Philippines. It was a near impossible jump because of the island's small size, tricky winds, steep sides and rugged terrain.

Thus, after weeks of naval and aerial bombardment, the Japanese who were prepared for an amphibious assault, were completely stunned when the 3d Battalion led the way by jumping onto the island on the morning of February 16, 1945.

It took the C-47 aircraft two hours in the 35 m.p.h. wind to drop the battalion because the planes could only drop eight men per stick on the small drop zones. Although taken by surprise, the Japanese defenders resisted fiercely to the last man and it took the Allies 11 days of continuous fighting to capture the "Rock" and open Manila Bay.

On the third anniversary of the 503d as a regiment, March 2, 1945, General Douglas MacArthur returned to Corregidor and was presented control of the island by the regiment.

As a result of this brilliant action, the regiment was later awarded the nickname of its most famous objective, "The Rock."

The 503d's final action of the war came in April when it responded to a call for help from an infantry division on the Philippine island of Negros. The island was secured throughout that spring and summer and the surrender of Japan found the 503d in full control of Negros. Soon afterward, on December 24, 1945, the regiment was deactivated.

During the Korean War, the 503d was reactivated and assigned to the 11th Airborne Division. It did not see combat, but instead trained in all parts of the United States, including Alaska.

In 1956, the regiment moved to Germany with the 11th Airborne, and in 1957 was reorganized under the battle group concept. The 1st Airborne Battle Group, 503d Infantry was still assigned to the 11th Airborne and the 2nd Airborne Battle Group, 503d Infantry was organized at Ft. Bragg as part of the 82nd Airborne Division.

In May of 1960, the latter was moved to Okinawa to become the Army's strike force in the Pacific, and with the addition of support units, was redesignated the 2nd Airborne Battle Group, 503d Infantry Combat Team. On June 25, 1963, it was reorganized again and became the 173d Airborne Brigade, with the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 503d Infantry.

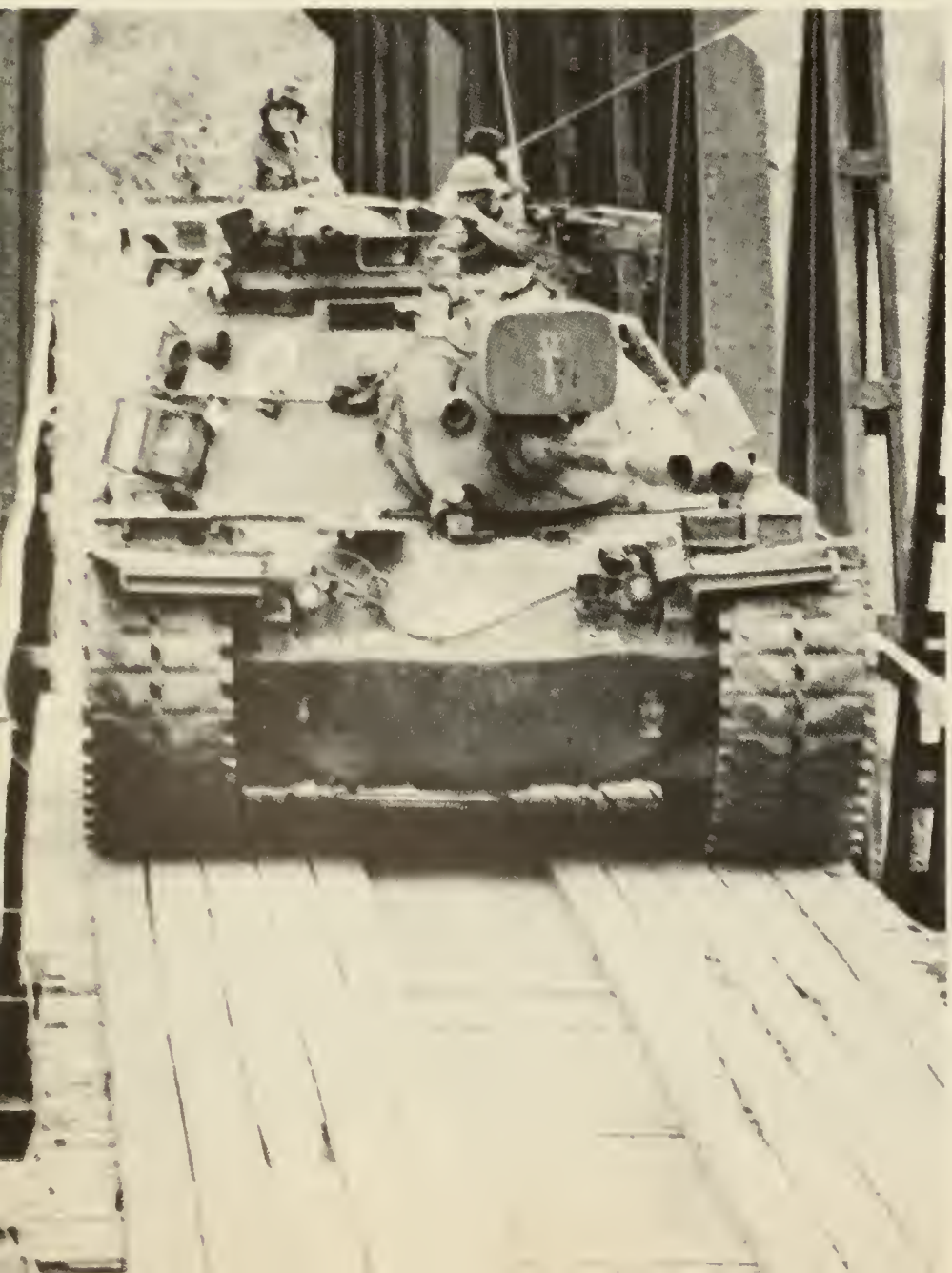
These two battalions, which moved with the 173d to Vietnam in May of 1965, have both been awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for combat actions in Vietnam. The 2nd Battalion conducted the only American combat jump of the Vietnam War in February of 1967.

The 4th Battalion joined the Brigade in June 1966 and quickly proved to be as effective a fighting unit as her sister battalions. The 3d Battalion sailed from San Francisco in October 1967 and immediately assumed control of Operation Bolling near Tuy Hoa when the other three battalions moved to Dak To.

1st battalion (mechanized), 50th infantry

The present unit was originally constituted as the 50th Infantry Regiment on May 15, 1917 and served with distinction in both World Wars. They were reactivated in 1967 and trained for combat duty in Vietnam in September of that year and began conducting operations on the coastal plains of Binh Dinh Province while attached to the 1st Cavalry Division. The unit was then attached to the 173d when it assumed control of Binh Dinh Province in March 1968.

With its tremendous firepower, it has proved to be an extremely versatile unit, combining the shock power of armor with the mobility of the infantry. When mounted on their armored personnel carriers, the mechanized infantrymen are capable of reconnaissance-in-force, cordon and search, road security, and search and clear missions. When dismounted, the unit can also conduct heliborne assaults into terrain too difficult for tracked vehicles and perform as a regular infantry outfit.



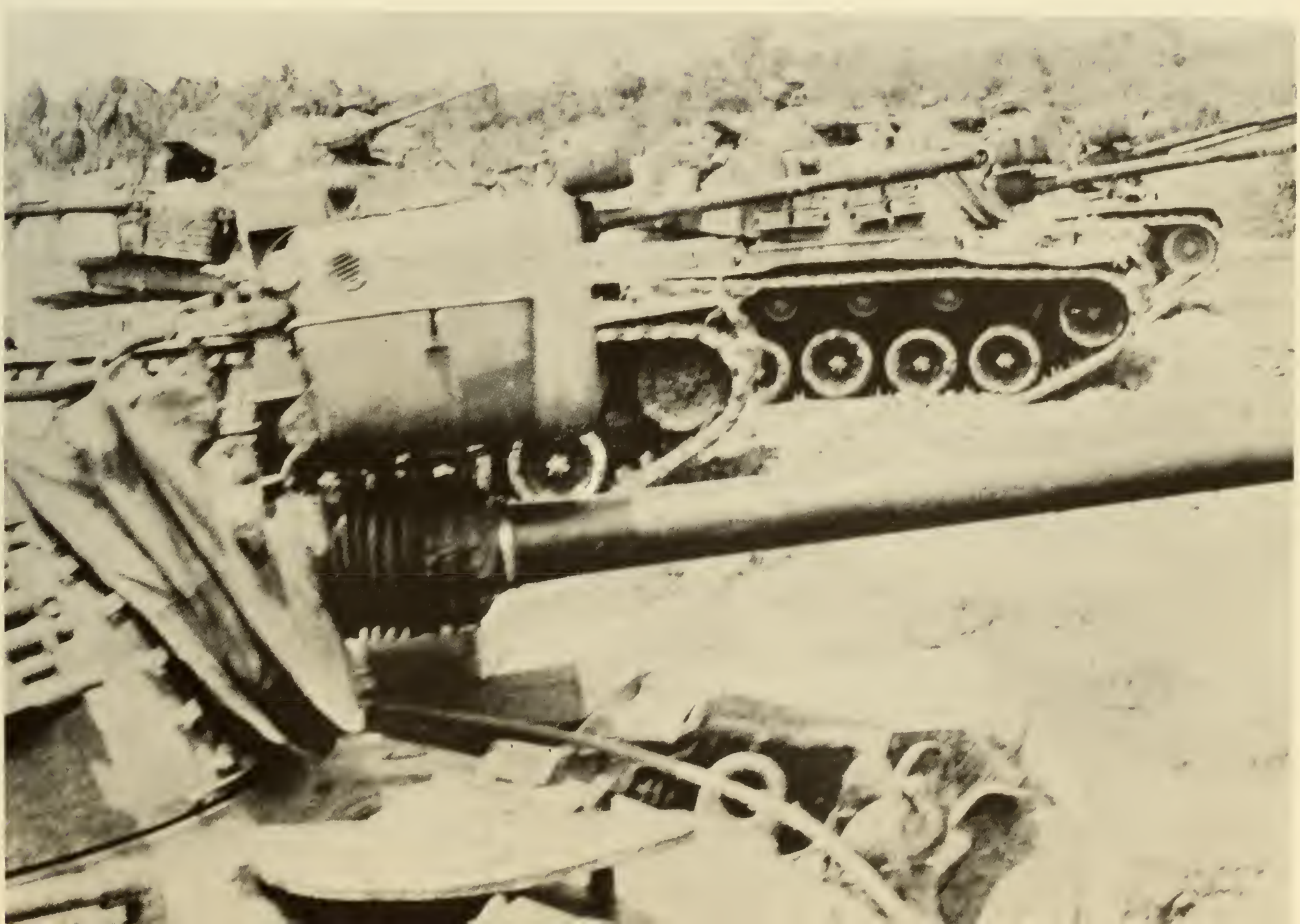
1st battalion, 69th armor

The heavily armed unit came under the operational control of the Brigade when the 173d moved into the Bong Son area in April 1968.

It was originally activated as the 69th Armor Regiment in July 1940 at Ft. Knox, Ky. and assigned to the 1st Armored Division. In September, 1943, the structure of the regiment was changed and the 3d Battalion was redesignated the 708th Amphibian Tractor Battalion and sent to the Pacific Theater. It fought in three campaigns during the war and received two Navy Presidential Unit Citations.

In Korea, the unit earned another citation when it was redesignated the 89th Medium Tank Battalion and spearheaded operations for 8th Army units. It was redesignated the 1st Battalion, 69th Armor in July 1963 in Hawaii, where it began preparations for deployment to Vietnam in December 1965.

The battalion arrived in January 1966 and immediately began to prove the effectiveness of armor in a guerilla war. It is presently used in road security, blocking, cordon and search, and reconnaissance-in-force missions.



3d battalion, 319th artillery

The unit was organized in August, 1917, at Camp Gordon, Ga., as Battery C, 319th Field Artillery Regiment. The battery served with distinction in the 82nd Infantry Division during World War I and was awarded battle streamers for Lorraine, St. Mihiel, and Meuse-Argonne.

After the war, the battalion's colors were cased until March 1942 when the 319th was reactivated at Camp Clairborne, La., again as part of the 82nd Infantry. When the division was converted to an airborne unit in August, 1942, the 319th also made the changeover, being redesignated as the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion.

After training in North Africa, Battery C participated in the Sicilian invasion and was awarded its first Distinguished Unit Citation for its outstanding achievements in the face of bitter enemy attacks. The battery's second citation was earned during the Normandy Beach invasion when it fired thousands of shells to secure the Douve and Mereret Rivers. More battle streamers were added to its colors when the 319th glided into Holland in September, 1944, and supported the 82nd Airborne in the Battle of the Bulge in December.

In April, 1959, Battery C, 319th Airborne Artillery set the record for the Army on entering "Fire for Effect" after a heavy drop. The cannoneers derigged and assembled their equipment, set up the Fire Direction Center, established communications and went into "Fire for Effect" after adjusting on a target of opportunity within 14 minutes and 50 seconds after the last man left the aircraft.

In June 1960, Battery C accompanied the 2nd Airborne Battle Group, 503d Infantry to Okinawa. When the 173d Airborne Brigade was organized three years later in June 1963, the battery formed the nucleus of the present 3d Battalion, 319th Artillery.

troop e, 17th cavalry

The 17th Cavalry was organized at Ft. Bliss, Texas in 1916 as a horse cavalry regiment armed with sabers, pistols and carbines. It did not see combat in either World War, however, and in 1951, the Headquarter Troop was combined with the 17th Armored Group and redesignated as Headquarters Troop, 17th Armored Cavalry Group. The 17th Armored Group fought with distinction during World War II in northern France and Central Europe.

The remaining troops of the regiment were disbanded at that time, but Troop E was reconstituted in May of 1959. It joined the 173d Airborne Brigade on Okinawa in 1963 as the only separate airborne cavalry troop in the Army.

Unlike the normal armored cavalry unit, the troop uses jeeps mounted with .50 cal. machine guns and 106mm recoiless rifles instead of tracked vehicles. With its mobility and firepower, the Cav can serve as a security, blocking, or reconnaissance and surveillance force when attached to another unit. When operating separately, the troop runs road-clearing operations, escorts convoys and conducts mounted and dismounted reconnaissance missions.

The troop is also used extensively as a ready reaction force for the Brigade, capable of heliborne assaulting into a hot spot on a moments notice. Occasionally, the unit deploys as a separate infantry force for reconnaissance-in-force, raid or ambush purposes.

Troop E has always lived up to its motto, "Ahead of the Best." Ever since the Brigade moved to Vietnam, the unit has spearheaded new operations and preceded the 173d on its frequent moves to new areas of operation. The troop was awarded the Valorous Unit Citation for actions during Operation Cedar Falls in January, 1967.

company d, 16th armor

A direct descendant of the 16th Cavalry Regiment which was organized in 1916, Company D is unique in that it is the only airborne separate tank company in the Army. It was reactivated in June 1963 and assigned to the Brigade on Okinawa.

Mounted in their armored personnel carriers, which they operate in lieu of their authorized Sheridan tanks, the airborne armormen are capable of everything from fire base security to reconnaissance-in-force missions and night ambushes.

Based in the Tuy Hoa area, they have been used mainly for securing the air base and escorting convoys. On a combat operation, they can sweep an area twice as fast as an infantry battalion when the terrain is right. The rice paddies and rolling hills in the highlands around Tuy Hoa are perfect for their tracks. The occasional thick brush presents no problem either as the vehicles can knock down trees up to ten inches in diameter.

Each personnel carrier is armed with a .50 caliber machine gun, two M-60 machine guns, and a rocket launcher. In addition, three of them carry 90mm recoiless rifles, making the company a formidable force which the enemy tries to avoid.

173d engineer company

The company was constituted on March 26, 1963, and activated with the Brigade in June on Okinawa. Since then, the company has provided the 173d with unexcelled engineer support from Bien Hoa to Dak To. It was awarded the Itschner Plaque as the most outstanding engineer unit in the entire Army during 1967 and the 2nd Platoon has been awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for actions from 1965 to 1967.

As combat engineers, they are capable of deploying with the infantry to cut landing zones, destroy enemy bunkers and explode booby-traps and mines. In addition, the engineers have the task of developing the forward base camp and constructing fire support bases. They produce tons of potable water daily at their four water purification points, construct bridges, repair roads, conduct minesweeps and engage in civic action projects.

The engineer work is never completed, as the company must support five manuever battalions, an armor company and a cavalry troop, instead of the three battalions it was originally designed to support. Yet the paratroopers of the unit have worked long and hard to make it one of the best engineer outfits in the Army during its brief history.

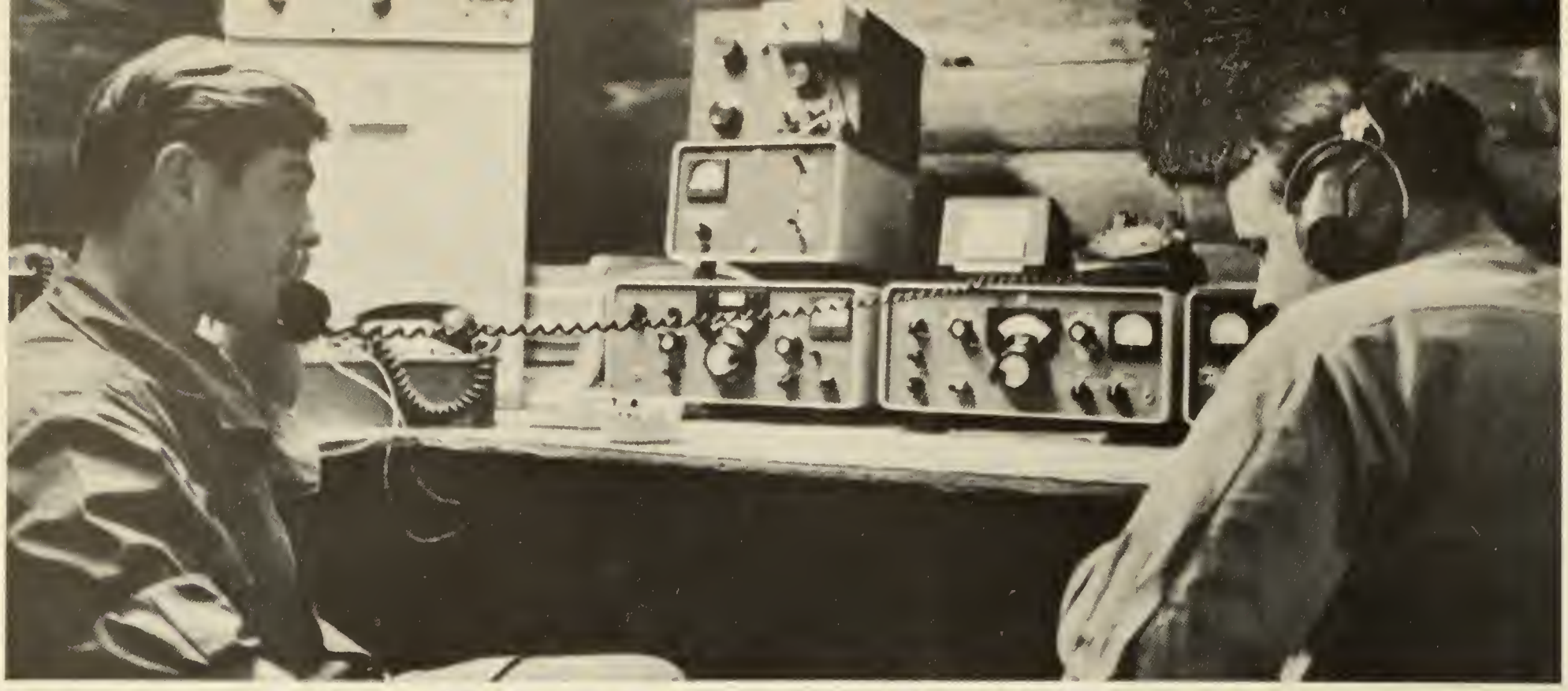
company n (airborne ranger), 75th infantry

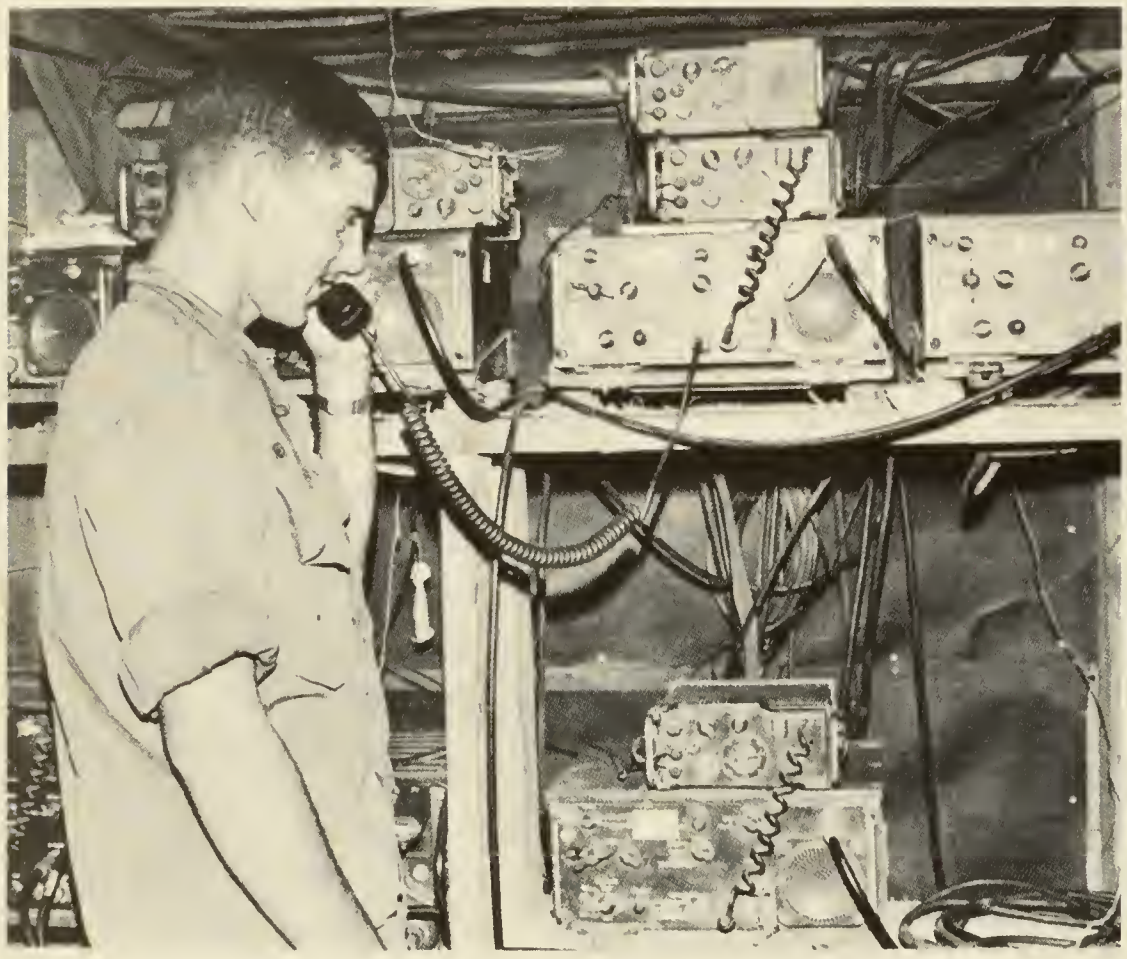
Prior to December 1967, the "eyes and ears" of the Brigade, more commonly known as LRPs (pronounced "Lurps"), existed as a platoon of Troop E, 17th Cavalry. At that time they became the 74th Infantry Detachment (Long Range Patrol), but in February 1969, they were again redesignated as Company N (Airborne Ranger) 75th Infantry.

Their main mission being to report on the location and activities of enemy forces, the LRP's follow in the tradition of the scouting parties down through the ages. They have refined the technique of using a small, self-sufficient mobile group of highly trained individuals. Added to the idea have been modern communication methods and helicopters, infiltration and extraction training.

The majority of LRP mission are for reconnaissance purposes, but the elite unit has enemy kills to its credit far out of proportion to its size. On some operations they have a secondary mission of capturing prisoners or ambushing a well-used trail. They are also capable of conducting large-scale combat patrols for raid or reconnaisance purposes.

The 74th Infantry was the first American unit to train South Vietnamese soldiers in LRP tactics and techniques. Each team is composed of American and Vietnamese members and both sides have been quick to praise the success of the idea.





173d signal company

In August 1967, the 723d Forward Area Signal Platoon arrived in Vietnam from Fort Riley, Kan. and combined with the communications platoon of Brigade headquarters to form the 173d Signal Company.

The unit, which handles the communications chores within the Brigade headquarters and between its far flung units, is divided into two platoons—one consisting of wiremen and switchboard operators and the other of radio technicians.

The wire or Command Operations platoon runs the Brigade tactical and administrative switchboards, lays, installs and repairs telephones and lines, and mans the operational Communications Center.

It would be impossible to keep telephone lines intact to the 173d's units through enemy territory; therefore, the radio platoon uses VHF (Very High Frequency) "shots" to relay phone calls through the atmosphere. The radiomen have also attached radios to a large helium balloon to increase the radio range many times over.

One thing the airborne signalmen take great pride in is their ability to break down, move and set up their commo quickly. When the Brigade headquarters moved to Bong Song, it took them a remarkable 82 hours.

The company's most appreciated task, however, is the operation of the MARS (Military Affiliate Radio System) station, whose high-powered radio transmitter enables 173d paratroopers to talk with family and friends back in the United States via the telephone.

39th scout dog platoon

Although it is one of the smallest units in the Brigade, the 39th Scout Dog Platoon is no doubt one of the most effective at finding the enemy. The unit is composed of both scout dogs, their handlers and the 75th Infantry Detachment (Combat Tracker).

The platoon, with its 24 German shepherds, joined the Brigade in August, 1966 at Bien Hoa. A scout dog and his handler are attached to an individual infantry company when they are needed and have been extremely useful at uncovering enemy ambushes, booby-traps and caches.

The 75th Infantry was attached to the 173d in October, 1967, and then assigned to the 39th in February, 1968. The unit has two teams consisting of a Labrador retriever and five men who have had seven weeks of intensive field training in Malaysia. Their primary mission is to reestablish contact with the enemy after a firefight.

Using both their own knowledge of the enemy and the dog's sense of smell, the teams can determine the number and sex of their quarry and whether they are NVA or Viet Cong. They can also often determine the enemy's morale, discipline and weapons.

Both the scout dogs and the combat trackers have proven their worth in Vietnam. Their highest compliments have been found in captured enemy documents which warn the Viet Cong and NVA to keep clear of the American dogs.

headquarters and headquarters company

Organized from the 173d Infantry Regiment of the 87th Infantry Division which saw action in Europe during World War II, the company is comprised of the personnel essential to the Brigade Commander for command and control of a complex fighting force.

Within the unit organization are located the staff officers and sections which advise the commander within their area of responsibility. Among them are: the S-1 through S-5, Information, Chemical and Signal Officers and the Brigade Surgeon, Provost Marshal, Chaplain, and Engineer.

A number of units are attached to Headquarters Company to assist the staff sections in carrying out their duties, including the 24th Military History Detachment, 46th Public Information Detachment, 172nd Military Intelligence Detachment, 51st Chemical Detachment, 404th Radio Research Unit, 628th Military Intelligence Detachment, U.S. Air Force Control Party, and American and Vietnamese military liaison personnel.

In addition the aviation and the MP platoons fall under the control of Headquarters Company.

173d military police platoon

The Brigade MP's arrived in country with the advance party of the 173d in 1965 and immediately began performing many duties in addition to directing traffic and awarding DR's.

They were often called upon to serve as infantrymen with line companies and many manned M-60's as door gunners which were sorely needed on helicopter gunships. In 1966 they were called upon to provide guards for interrogation and Civil Affairs teams, control refugees and conduct reconnaissance of roads and bridges. They also acted as security for fire support bases and for engineers who were busy with construction.

In 1967, they made the combat jump with the 2nd Battalion and once on the ground, established PW compounds, secured engineer work parties and once again served in an infantry capacity. At Dak To, the airborne policemen provided mobile fire power for supply convoys and secured the roads and airstrip.

The 173d MP's, scattered throughout the Brigade's areas of operation, presently patrol the roads, towns and villages, man perimeter gates and traffic control points, maintain detainee compounds, provide ready reaction forces and keep internal law and order by rigidly enforcing regulations and policies.

casper platoon

The only separate aviation platoon in the Army, Casper was organized with the Brigade on Okinawa in 1963 and arrived in country in May 1965. Since that time it has flown almost every type of heliborne mission—including resupply, dust off, "Snoopy," visual reconnaissance, command and control, and combat assault.

Its main responsibility is to provide UH-1D "Hueyslicks" as command and control ships for the Brigade's commanders and OH-6 "Loaches" for reconnaissance and surveillance missions.

The dedication and esprit d'corps of the Caspers is widely known and is shown by their extension rate, which is the highest in the Brigade.

173d support battalion

Formed along with the Brigade on Okinawa, the four primary companies of the battalion provide administrative, medical, logistical and maintenance support for the 173d's combat troopers.

Every large organization must, out of necessity, handle vast amounts of paperwork to smooth the continuous flow of personnel. In the Brigade, this task belongs to the paratroopers of Company A (Administration). The men of the Adjutant General's Office are responsible for orders, promotions, re-enlistments, transfers, records, awards and decorations, and special services.

Pay is an important matter for every soldier in the Brigade and the clerks in the Finance Office work long, tedious hours to insure that all Sky Soldiers are paid in full and on time. In addition, a pay team is sent once a week to the forward areas to straighten up financial complications for the combat troops.

Mail is probably foremost in the minds of every man in the 173d, and the 45th Army Postal Unit, attached to Company A, does everything possible to get the mail to the troops as quickly as possible. In addition, A Admin's Replacement Detachment processes all paratroopers on arrival, R&R and DEROS.

The primary mission of Company B (Medical) is to provide emergency medical treatment for the men of the Brigade. A dust off chopper is always minutes away from take-off and the four doctors and the medics of the company are always prepared for any emergency. In addition, they provide daily sick call for all personnel stationed at the Brigade's forward command post. They also treat ARVN soldiers and Vietnamese civilians when no other facilities are available and pull MEDCAP's in the Bong Son area.

B Med's one dentist is capable of providing the best of dental care and treatment, including routine and restorative surgery. The company also maintains a small pharmacy, a diagnostic laboratory, and X-ray facilities.

The infantry troops of the Brigade could not begin to fight without the supply line which begins at the battalion fire support base and ends back in the states. Company C (Supply and Service) is charged with keeping this vital supply line flowing smoothly.

The "Airborne Express" two-and-a-half-ton trucks of the transportation platoon haul supplies to the 173d's widely scattered units while the men of the supply platoon maintain stockpiles in the forward areas to fill the units' daily needs. The riggers of the air equipment support platoon, besides continuously repacking parachutes to keep the Brigade capable of making a combat jump at any time, also work with each manuever battalion on Air Delivery Teams that rig sling loads for helicopters to resupply troops in the field.

The dust, mud and humidity of Vietnam exact a heavy toll on all the vehicles, equipment and machinery the Brigade uses. It is up to Company D (Maintenance) to keep all these items functioning properly.

The skilled technicians and repairmen of the unit are required to perform third echelon maintenance on everything from helicopters to howitzers. In addition, D Maintenance is capable of prefabricating many repair parts and maintains the Brigade Maintenance Office, which stocks parts for every piece of equipment in the Brigade. Special maintenance teams from the company also accompany convoys in case of a vehicle breakdown.

training

Hundreds of replacements arrive at the Brigade's basecamp at An Khe each month with the knowledge that their Army training days are over. They soon learn, however, that knowledge can save lives in Vietnam and the 173d Jungle School was designed to give them that knowledge.

Mandatory for all enlisted men and company grade officers, the week-long course consists of lessons learned the hard way by the paratroopers of the Brigade and taught by the combat veterans themselves.

The school covers, often very realistically, everything the newcomer wants and needs to know—the ways of the Brigade, the war, the country and the enemy. Included are classes on tactics, first aid, American and enemy weapons, characteristics and habits of the enemy, booby-traps and mines, dustoff procedures, the Vietnamese people and customs, and the history of the Brigade.

To complete the course, the class goes on an overnight field problem outside the basecamp perimeter. On occasion, the Jungle School company has made contact with the enemy and has received credit for VC kills, caches discovered and weapons captured.

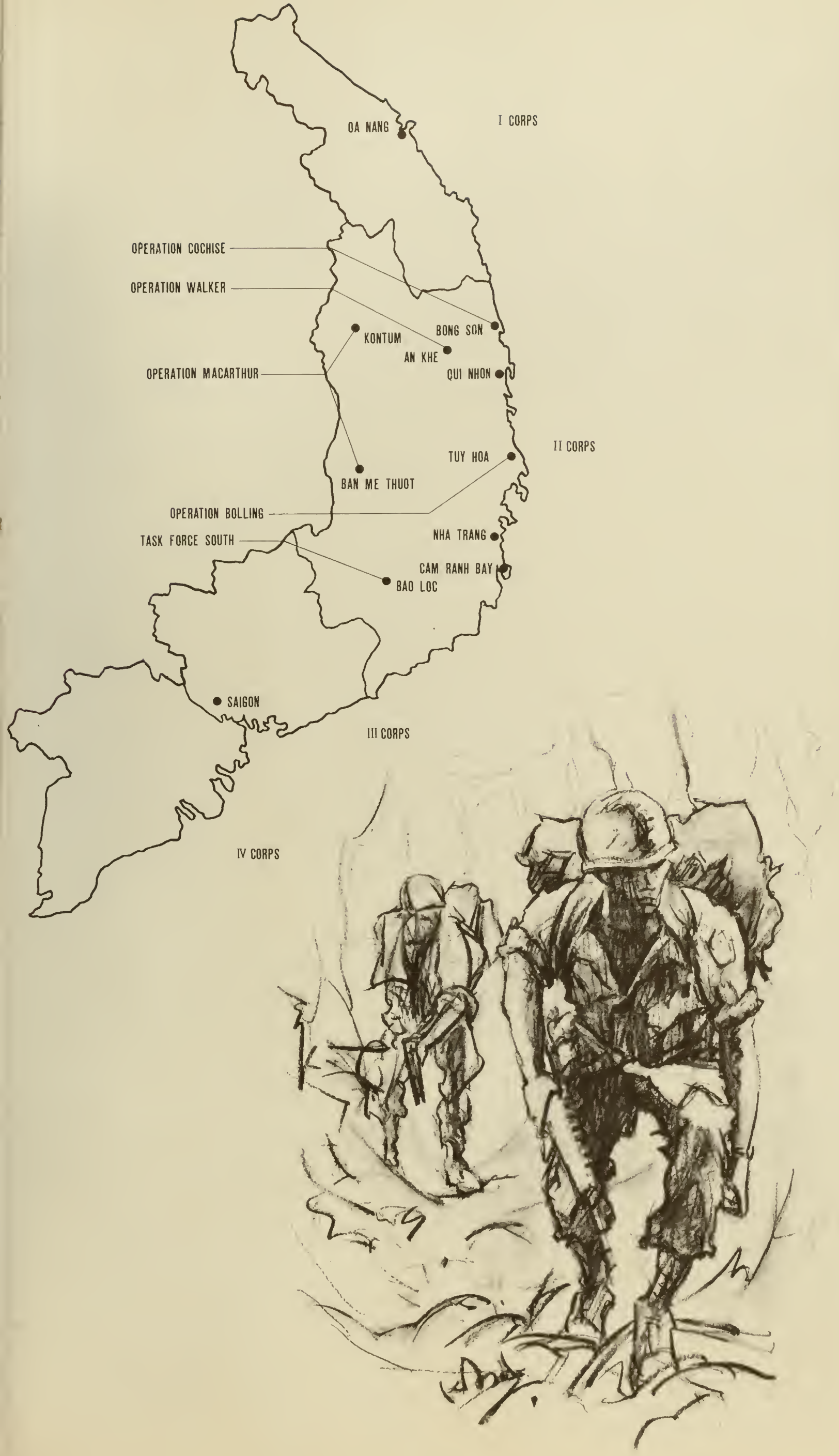
To maintain its airborne capability, the Brigade also began a Jumpmaster School under the supervision of the Support Battalion at An Khe. Taught by riggers from Company C (S & S) and other jumpmasters from the Brigade's units, it consists of a refresher course for already qualified personnel and a complete course to train new jumpmasters.

In addition to training Americans, the Brigade has undertaken the task of teaching Vietnamese military personnel U.S. tactics and techniques. Advisory teams work with RF/PF (Regional Forces/Popular Forces) units in the area to improve their efficiency and make them a better fighting force.

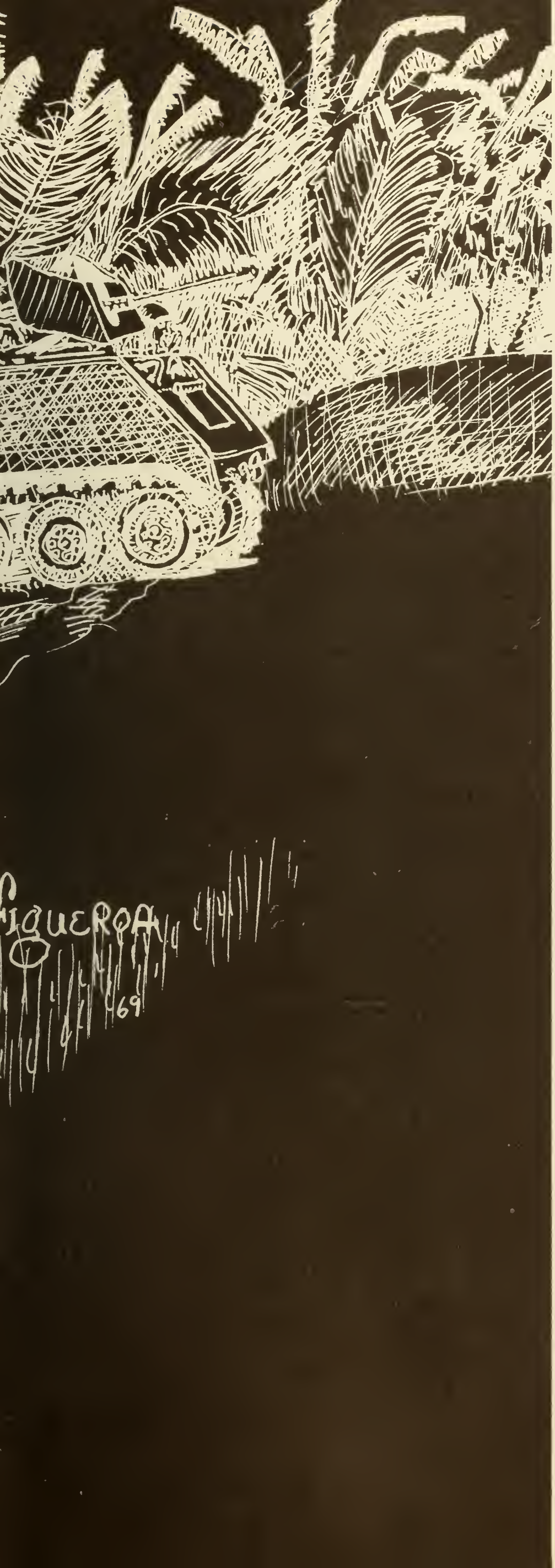
The 173d has also established a very successful course for RF/PF officers and NCO's at An Khe. Dubbed the RF/PF Leadership School, it gives them classes in weapons, patrolling, ambushes, leadership, and enemy tactics and capabilities.

The effectiveness of the training has been shown by the increased confidence and fighting ability of the RF/PF. In one significant action, a PF unit killed 28 and captured one of a 30-man VC force which attacked their hamlet.

The 74th Infantry Detachment (LRP) also has trained ARVN soldiers in long range patrol techniques. The ARVN's were assigned to each team and their American team leaders have praised their performance in the field. They have returned to their units to form their own LRP teams.



the fourth year



operations

The beginning of the Brigade's fourth year in Vietnam found the 173d conducting three major operations in the II Corps Tactical Zone.

The 4th Battalion and Company D, 16th Armor were responsible for protecting the rice harvest of the rich coastal plains near Tuy Hoa in Operation Bolling/Dan Hoa. The 2nd Battalion was charged with securing the Brigade basecamp at An Khe and protecting Highway 19, the main communications route from the Qui Nhon docks to the Central Highlands, from An Khe pass to Mang Yang pass in Operation Walker.

The Brigade Forward Command Post and the rest of the 173d was in the Central Highlands near Kontum, conducting reconnaissance-in-force missions under the operational control of the 4th Infantry Division in Operation MacArthur.

The first big enemy contact came on March 4 when Company D, 16th Armor and units of the 47th ARVN Regiment tangled with a two-battalion VC/NVA force. The airborne armormen had been called to the rescue when the enemy attacked the 47th's headquarters north of Tuy Hoa City from three well-fortified villages to the east.

One platoon from D/16th deployed in full defilade as a blocking force between the enemy and the ocean to the east while the ARVN's blocked from the south and west. The remaining two platoons of armored personnel carriers, backed by ARVN infantrymen and supported by gunships and fighter-bombers, began assaulting the villages from the north.

The paratroopers quickly smashed through fierce enemy resistance to clear the first two villages. As the attack continued into the third village, the fighting became especially vicious as the APC's approached the enemy CP and the ARVN infantry withdrew.

After several of the tracks took direct hits from B-40 rockets and recoilless rifles, the lack of supporting infantry and the rapidly approaching darkness forced the armormen to withdraw. But they still managed to recover their wounded and destroy all damaged equipment.

Over 200 enemy were killed during the seven-hour battle, 137 of them credited to Company D. Korean and Vietnamese units completed the mop-up of the battlefield the next day.

During March in Operation MacArthur, the 1st and 3d Battalions made contact almost daily with the numerous NVA units in the Kontum area while E/17th Cavalry patrolled the highway to Pleiku.

On March 6, the Cav moved to the aid of a convoy which had been ambushed by an estimated NVA company. With support from B Company, 1/69th Armor, E Troop killed four enemy and captured two more. When the unit swept the contact area the next day with armor and infantry in support, the action resulted in 17 more NVA killed.

In three separate actions during the month, Charlie Company of the 1st Battalion got 18 enemy kills by body count and a possible 15 more. They also discovered a tunnel complex which contained 35 enemy killed by air strikes.

Two other noteworthy events happened during March. The first occurred when Brigadier General Richard J. Allen assumed command of the Brigade on March 20, replacing Brigadier General Leo H. Schweiter. The other was the173d's move to the Bong Son area and the assumption of responsibility for Binh Dinh, Phu Yen and Phu Bon Provinces. The 1/50th and the 1/69th joined the Brigade at this time and the 2nd Battalion also moved to Bong Son while the 1/503d took over Operation Walker around An Khe.

Action picked up in Operation Walker during April with the largest contact of the operation on the 10th. The 1/503d and the 1/69th were put on alert when intelligence reports indicated Highway 19 would be ambushed by a battalion of the 95B NVA Regiment.

The action started when a mine-sweep team discovered

and started to disarm a 105mm howitzer round in the middle of the highway. The NVA triggered the round and then prematurely sprang their ambush. Reaction forces from A Company, 1/69th and A Company, 1/503d immediately swept the area and encountered numerous groups of NVA trying to escape to the north. With supporting artillery, gunships and fighter-bombers, the tankers killed 46 enemy and captured another four.

When Operation Cochise/Dan Sinh began on March 30, the Brigade faced a twin challenge: to rid the heavily-jungled mountain areas of the NVA main-force units which were based there, and then to destroy the Viet Cong cadre and infrastucture in the rich, rice-producing lowlands.

Paratroopers of the 2nd and 3d Battalions began combing the Tiger and Nui Mieu Mountains looking for the enemy while the 1/50th swept the coastal plains and valleys. Contact was light throughout April as the enemy avoided the 173d, but numerous caches and basecamps were found.

Charlie Company of the 2nd Battalion discovered a VC hospital and captured six enemy on the 5th and Alpha Company discovered a former basecamp of the 3d NVA Division on the 18th. Among the articles found in the camp were a large printing press and propaganda leaflets in Korean and Vietnamese.

Long range patrols ranged far and wide searching for the enemy, calling artillery in on them when they were found. The 1/50th piled up rice caches almost daily, some as large as seven tons.

It was obvious that the enemy had broken down into small units and was avoiding contact until he could choose the time and the place. On May 4 they were ready and with their objectives as LZ Uplift and the Phu My District Headquarters, the 22nd NVA Regiment began moving down from its mountain hideouts.

But they had not counted on the increasingly dependable 173d intelligence network. Just the day before the move, the 1st Battalion, 50th Infantry was moved to positions between the enemy units and their objectives.

On the afternoon of May 5, the battle was initiated when two battalions of the 22nd NVA Regiment attacked the noon defensive position of Alpha Company, 1/50th in Crescent Valley just off Highway 1.

The vicious B-40 rocket, recoiless rifle, and automatic weapons attack caught the Americans off-balance and within five minutes, five of the nine APC's were put out of action. But the mechanized infantrymen maintained their calm, and while the still-functioning tracks disengaged to regroup, the dismounted soldiers scattered behind the rice paddy dikes and began returning fire.

Meanwhile, Charlie, 1/50th and Bravo, 1/69th had been alerted and were lead to the battle area by Alpha's returning APC's. With the tankers in the lead, the relief forces stormed into the battle supported by naval fire, artillery, gunships and air strikes.

The fighting ebbed at dusk and the Americans pulled back into a night defensive position. Before dawn however, they came under a heavy mortar, rocket and ground assault, and sporadic to heavy contact continued through the next day and a half as reinforcements from the 2nd and 3d Battalions were airlifted into the area.

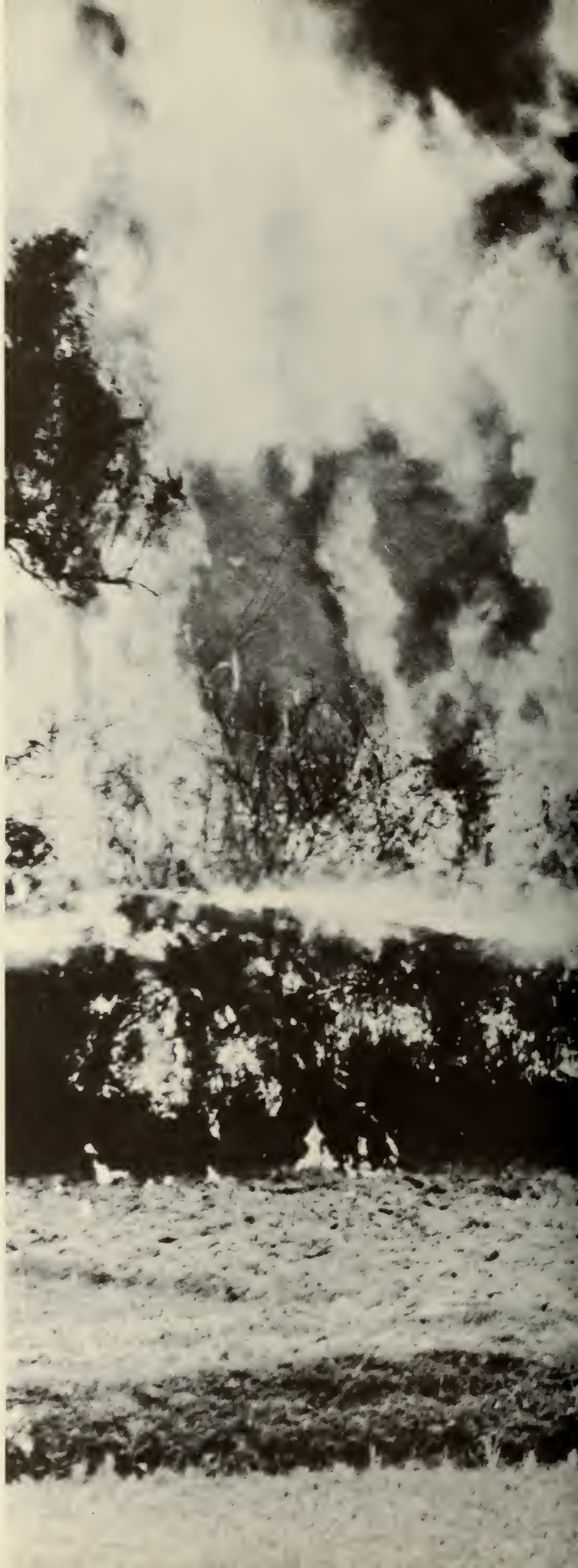
The enemy had broken down into small units and fled. But sweeps through the contact area revealed 176 NVA bodies and the actual death toll was considered to be much higher than the body count indicated.

A senior enlisted man in the North Vietnamese Army who turned himself in under the Chieu Hoi Program after the battle, said that the two enemy battalions were almost totally destroyed.

Also on May 5, Bravo Company, 3/503d killed 13 VC and captured 11 weapons in a well-executed, early morning ambush. Later that morning, Alpha Company, 2/503d discovered blood trails from Bravo's ambush and traced them to the ocean. The VC were visible off-shore in fishing boats confiscated from civilians, so gunships were called in and killed 11 more. An hour later, Alpha engaged still another VC force, killing five and detaining 37.

The action remained light in Cochise until the 11th, when the 1/50th again tangled with an NVA main-force unit. Bravo and Charlie Companies, while on a reconnaissance-in-force mission to the north, were attacked by an estimated battalion employing automatic weapons and B-40 rockets.

Reinforced by elements of the 1/69th Armor, artillery and gunships, the mechanized infantrymen battled the enemy for two hours before withdrawing to make room for air strikes. A sweep of the area turned up 60 enemy bodies and 46 more were found two days later, killed as a result of air strikes.



The day before, Bravo Company, 3/503d had killed 10 NVA in a three-hour firefight, and the 3d Battalion continued to keep the pressure on the enemy during the next few days. They killed 14 in two ambushes, captured four tons of rice, detained 21 suspects and uncovered a large munitions cache.

Contact remained light but constant from the 14th to the 24th, indicating the enemy was attempting to withdraw and regroup. But the action flared again on the 25th when Bravo Company, 1/50th made its last contact of the month with elements of a fleeing NVA battalion.

The 33 enemy that were killed all had brand-new equiment and were believed to be replacements for the 3d NVA Division. There was no doubt that the 173d had completely disrupted the division's activities.

The month closed quietly with Delta Company, 2/503d finding three more tons of rice, which brought the two-month total for the operation to well over a hundred tons. The rice was redistributed to needy families.

Operations Bolling and Walker remained quiet during May, except for one firefight in which Charlie Company, 1/503d accounted for 20 enemy kills. This same relative quiet was to prevail throughout the the 173d areas of opertion for the three summer months.

It became obvious early in June that the 3d NVA Division had pulled out of the area to receive replacements, reequip, retrain and recover from the beating inflicted by the Brigade. It left behind small units to aid the local VC in sniping, booby-trap and mining operations and terrorist attacks.

It proved to be a summer of long hours and sporadic action for the Sky Soldiers—one of the slowest fighting periods since the 173d arrived in country. But the Brigade was not alone in being unable to battle the enemy, as NVA and VC main-force units took advantage of a bombing lull over North Vietnam to regroup.

With contact being made with only squad-sized units, the biggest action during June and July was initiated by LRP team Delta of the 74th Infantry. It resulted in four VC killed by body count and a possible six more.

The Brigade concentrated on keeping the enemy remnants and local VC disorganized and on the run through reconnaissance-in-force operations and harassment and interdiction artillery fire. Search and clear operations were aimed at finding the enemy's basecamps and destroying them to prevent their further use.

In a series of giant cave complexes deep in the Suoi Ca Mountains, mechanized infantrymen from the 1/50th found the most exciting cache of the operation. A platoon from Bravo Company, who had left their APC's a week earlier to search the rugged mountains on foot, discovered $150,000 in U.S. 50-dollar bills in one of the caves. Saigon officials termed it the "largest money hoard of the war".

In mid-June, the 3d Battalion moved 250 miles south to Bao Loc and became the major manuever element in Task Force South. A bold, new concept, it was a joint command in which Americans, instead of acting as advisors, conduct combined operations. The 3d Battalion has remained there until the present date.

The 4th Battalion also moved in August, from its relatively calm AO Dan Hoa to Ban Me Thout near the Cambodian border to assist the 4th Infantry Division. During a month of contact, the paratroopers made forays into territory which had never been entered by American troops. The "Geronimo" Battalion accounted for 51 confirmed enemy dead and captured large weapons and ammunition caches during four firefights in the beleagured Duc Lap area.

The unit returned to Tuy Hoa in the middle of October and resumed Operation Dan Hoa, in which the 95th NVA Regiment was still regrouping and avoiding contact.

Still another move came in August when the 1/50th, which had swept the coastal plains near Bong Son and Phu My for nearly a year, exchanged places with the An Khe-based 1/503d.

The biggest single contact for the 173d during the month was made by the 3d Battalion in a defensive action. Mortarmen and infantrymen from Echo and Alpha Companies, aided by dusters and howitzers firing at point blank range, repulsed a vicious enemy assault. The estimated NVA battalion left 45 bodies strewn around the mini-base near Di Linh.

With the NVA main-force elements virtually routed from AO Dan Sinh and the local VC units on the run, the Brigade prepared to root out and destroy the Viet Cong infrastructure in the villages and hamlets of the Bong Son Plains.

In conjunction with the 40th ARVN Regiment, the 173d began Operation Dan Sinh 22–6 on the 22nd of August. The first phase was a search and clear operation designed to sweep the entire Bong Son Plains. Rome plows were used to clear the hedgerows and trench systems and to destroy the tunnels and caves which characterize the entire area. This was done first to deny their use to the Viet Cong for storage of personnel and supplies.

The next phase, which began in early September and lasted until late October, was the detailed interrogation and complete reclassification of civilians living in the Bong Son Plains area. With the aid of the 202nd National Police Field Force Company, which made it possible to screen a large number of people quickly and efficiently, the allies checked almost 13,000 people.

The technique used was to air assault a rifle company to surround a village early in the morning or to cordon it just before dusk the day prior to the search. Two or three armored vehicles were usually used as a blocking force. Then the village would be searched and the inhabitants checked for identification cards.

Contact with numerous three to five-man Viet Cong units was made during the six-battalion operation and resulted in a total of 237 Viet Cong killed. In addition, 122 confirmed and 115 suspected Viet Cong were detained, and 63 small arms and eight crew-served weapons were captured. All this was accomplished at a minimum loss to allied forces.

While this operation was being conducted successfully, elements of the 18th NVA Regiment, the stay-behind force of the 3d NVA Division, made an attempt to return to the lowlands.

On September 22, elements of the 41st ARVN Regiment made the initial contact with the enemy in the Suoi Ca Mountains and the 1/503d was air lifted in the next day to try to encircle the enemy. The 1/69th Armor moved in from the west up the Suoi Ca Valley to establish blocking positions.

After the initial contact by Delta Company, 1/503d, the mission changed to reconnaissance-in-force as the enemy began withdrawing and it was no longer possible to encircle them. Reconnaissance ships from D Troop, 2/1st Cavalry were responsible for sighting the enemy locations that resulted in major contact and Charlie Company, 1/503d, carried the brunt of the action. The North Vietnamese suffered 197 dead in the week-long battle before they fled back into the mountains.

In mid-September, intelligence sources indicated elements of the 95B Regiment were again becoming active in AO Walker and were planning an attack on Camp Radcliff. Consequently, Task Force Schnoor was formed to halt the enemy build up in southern Binh Dinh and northern Phu Bon Provinces.

The contact was light during the 12-day operation, but its mission was accomplished successfully. The enemy were dispersed before they had a chance to even move close to the An Khe area.

The beginning of the next month saw the 2nd Battalion taking part in operations rarely conducted by paratroopers—amphibious assaults. Supported by Naval destroyers, the Sky Soldiers splashed ashore from the South China Sea in landings reminiscent of World War II Pacific operations. Numerous suspects were detained in VC villages on the coast as the element of surprise worked against the enemy just as it was intended to.

Elsewhere in Operation Dan Sinh, long range patrols continued to harass the remaining VC elements, calling in artillery on their basecamps, intercepting couriers and ambushing their trails. One enemy haven was discovered near the I Corps border, where the pinpoint accuracy of the 3/319th Artillery had killed 35.

In late October, Alpha Company, 3/503d uncovered an immense Viet Cong jungle hospital in southern II Corps. MACV medical authorities termed it the most sophisticated enemy hospital complex find of the war. Bravo 3/503d also pushed an NVA rear-guard unit out of its basecamp near Dalat, killing 10 in the process.

The month of November and December saw old patterns repeated as the enemy continued to avoid contact with the Brigade. Whenever intelligence reports indicated an enemy build-up, they would fade away after little or no contact when friendly forces entered the area.

Since the enemy had decided to go back to his old game of breaking down and operating in small units, the 173d followed suit. Squad-sized Hunter-Killer or Hawk teams were organized in the line companies and began ambushing infiltration routes and well-used trails.

These Hawk teams and LRP patrols accounted for most of the 81 enemy kills credited to the Brigade in AO Dan Sinh during November. Paratroopers continued combing the Tiger, Nui Mieu, Vinh Thanh and Suoi Ca Mountains, turning up numerous caches and basecamps.

Activity in AO Walker increased in December with two large enemy build-ups, but neither yielded much contact when friendly forces entered the area. The 4th Battalion, which made the move to An Khe from Tuy Hoa at the end of November to counter another threat from the 95B NVA Regiment, made the biggest find—a large medical and food cache. The 2nd Battalion also moved to An Khe in December, but returned to Bong Son a month later after little significant contact.

December also saw Brigadier General Richard J. Allen, after a very successful nine months with the Brigade, hand the 173d colors to Brigadier General John W. Barnes.

Diligence paid off for the continously searching paratroopers in January as they uncovered two of the largest enemy caches ever found by the Brigade. The 4th Battalion turned up another medical cache—300 Pounds of surgical instruments, drugs, plasma, bandages and a microscope—the biggest of its kind in 173d history.

A week later, a Hawk team from the 2nd Battalion found the biggest weapons cache of the operation in Binh Dinh Province; it included a recoiless rifle, a mortar, rounds for both, grenades, mines, small arms and ammunition.

Alpha Company, 1/50th and D/16th Armor both saw relatively heavy fighting during the month as action increased slightly in Dan Hoa and Walker. Alpha killed 21 NVA in several separate contacts during the first three weeks of January as the enemy tried unsuccessfully to sever Highway 19.

Thirteen more were killed by D/16th when the armored unit combined with elements of the 47th ARVN Regiment in a unique night operation on the 15th. Two weeks later the airborne armormen were called upon to rescue a beleagured RF unit north of Tuy Hoa. Twenty enemy bodies were counted after the APC's had routed the estimated NVA company.

On the last day of the month, Operations Cochise/Dan Sinh, Bolling/Dan Hoa and Walker were terminated and Operations Dung Cam/Lee, Li Do/Wainwright, and Suc Manh/Marshall were instituted in their places. A total of 929 enemy were killed during Cochise, while 705 were killed in Bolling and 272 in Walker.

In addition, the end of the operations saw the enemy thwarted in any large scale missions and limited only to hit-and-run tactics. The Brigade had chased the main-force units out of the AO's or else forced them to break down into small units and hide. The local VC also felt the pressure as Hawk teams ambushed their trails and intercepted their couriers, while combined ARVN–U.S. operations continued to destroy the communist infrastructure in the lowlands.

While LRP teams watched infiltration routes for the possible return of the main-force units, infantrymen continued to uncover the enemy's basecamps and cashes. As a result, intelligence reports indicated the enemy's morale was extremely low from hunger, sickness and the defeats inflicted by the Brigade.

In February, two tactical concepts began to pay off for the Brigade as over 280 enemy were killed by the Sky Soldiers, almost quadrupling the monthly average for the past year.

Hawk operations, of which almost 4,000 had been conducted since their iniation in November, still continued to account for the great majority of the Brigade's kills. The 1st and 2nd Battalions, 503d Infantry and the 74th Infantry LRP's, operating exclusively in Hawk teams, ranged far and wide in AO Lee. Penetrating even into the enemy's most inaccessible strongholds, they were so successful at disrupting the enemy's activities that the expected Tet offensive did not materialize in Binh Dinh Province.

In addition, the Brigade began keeping a platoon reaction force standing by at a chopper pad so as to be able to react immediately to intelligence and visual reconnaissance reports before the enemy could leave the area. Dubbed "Sky Sweep", the mission was usually supported by slicks, Loaches and Cobras from Delta Troop, 2/1st Cavalry.

The month's most successful Sky Sweep came on the 14th when a Casper Loach killed five Viet Cong on an island off the coast. From documents found on the bodies, an interpretor from the 172nd Military Intelligence Detachment was able to determine the exact time and location of a local VC cadre meeting scheduled for that afternoon.

Hawk teams from Bravo and Charlie Companies of the 2nd Battalion and an RF/PF squad were airlifted near the village meeting place and 24 Viet Cong were killed in the ensuing firefight.

Meanwhile the 4th Battalion, which had moved back to AO Wainwright at the end of January, began a massive cordon and search operation with elements of the Republic of Korea Capitol Division. The biggest day of the operation came on the 4th when the allies killed 21 enemy in several separate clashes. Fifteen more were killed by artillery on the same day.

Still with Task Force South, the 3d Battalion had a successful month, killing 67 enemy in a battle near the III Corps border and uncovering a large cache. Found by Alpha Company, it included 196 B-40 rockets, ninety 82mm mortar rounds, ninety-three 60mm mortar rounds, plastic explosives, and numerous other rocket and small arms rounds.

in the 173d, said one paratrooper,
you're either on an operation, coming
back from one, or getting ready for another . . .

an operation usually begins with a heliborne assault . . .
then most of the time is spent humping and searching
for the enemy . . . when he is found, there is a firefight . . .
then more humping and more searching . . .

it has been said that in vietnam, there is the infantry and then there is everyone else . . . but the infantryman is grateful that everyone else is there . . . including artillery, mortars, armor and especially, the dustoff . . .

the land and the people

there are the old people who look as though they had seen the birth of vietnam's 2,000-year old civilization . . . gnarled and bent, they can remember when there was no war . . .
but with patience and wisdom acquired through the years, they look forward toward a better time . . .

. . . and there are the young who have known
war all their lives . . . they have seen death
and destruction . . . but rather than being
weakened, they have been strengthened . . .
with knowledge and experience beyond
their years, they form the basis for a struggling
nation's bright future . . .

they have been plagued by war for almost thirty years . . . and for a much longer period have they endured hunger, poverty, ignorance and disease . . . but both young and old have the will to work and fight as long as necessary to gain the peace and freedom which they seek . . .

the war

reconnaissance-in-force

The great majority of the Brigade's operations are reeonnaissance-in-force missions. The infantry must find the enemy, then destroy him, his equipment and his base-camps.

But finding the enemy when he does not want to be found is not easy. Therefore the 173d has come to rely a great deal on an extensive intelligenee network to loeate the elusive enemy.

"Snoopy" (ehemieal device which "smells" human odors) readings, visual reeonnaissance helicopter missions, aerial photography, long range patrol reports, Red Haze (detects heat from enemy camp fires) readings. . . they all

contribute to the intelligence reports which have been extremely accurate in uncovering enemy activities and locations.

But when the paratroopers enter these areas, the enemy often flees after light contact, leaving caches of rice and equipment behind. The infantrymen have no choice but to follow, for that is their job—to close with and destroy the enemy.

The infantry spends many months at a time in the field, but only a small portion of it is in actual combat. Most of the time is spent "humping" enormous rucksacks up and down the thickly jungled mountains and muddy rice paddies, searching for "Charlie".

But the paratrooper accepts his way of life and seeks ways of making it more comfortable, despite the heat and dust, rain and mud, mosquitoes and leeches which plague him.

When the enemy does stand and fight, he usually chooses the time and place. But the infantrymen are always ready to react with teamwork, discipline and courage. Artillery and air support are usually called in, but in the end, it is the infantry which is the ultimate weapon.

cordon and search

In the heavily populated lowlands of Binh Dinh Province, the Viet Cong have painstakingly built up and maintained a complex political infrastructure in many villages and hamlets.

The cordon and search mission is aimed at rooting out and destroying this organization. It is initiated when an infantry company seals off a village early in the morning or the night before the search. Then the people of the village are gathered together, questioned and have their identification cards checked by National Police.

Young men of military age, persons without identification and other suspects are detained and taken to rear areas for further questioning. Villagers who are on the government side often reveal useful information on enemy activity and locations.

The village is then searched carefully for surplus rice, weapons, ammunition, equipment, tunnel complexes and anything else indicative of the enemy's presence. Armored vehicles are often placed in blocking positions as small Viet Cong units and cadre hiding in the village will attempt to escape at the approach of allied troops.

Armed Propaganda Teams, composed of Vietnamese civilian interpreters, often accompany these missions to explain to the people just what the Saigon government is trying to accomplish. In addition, many MEDCAP's are held during these missions, to show the people that Americans are trying to help them.

The success of the cordon and search mission, combined with the low cost in Allied lives, has proven very effective in helping to win the war.

road security

Keeping Highways 1 and 19 in Operations Dan Sinh and Walker secure and open to traffic has been one of the Brigade's foremost objectives during the past year.

The first part of this objective has been accomplished by the infantry who have kept the enemy main-force units on the run and away from the highway. Then cavalry and armored units finish the job by patrolling the roads, escorting convoys, manning check points and bridges and acting as reaction forces ready to cope with any trouble on the highway.

Engineers also conduct daily, early-morning, mine sweeps of the road to remove mines and booby traps before the day's traffic begins.

The success of these missions is shown by the fact that Highways 1 and 19 have never been closed to traffic as a result of enemy action for more than 30 minutes.

SPT S&S 73

airmobile operations

The nature of the Vietnam war—a guerrilla action against an elusive enemy often in untenable terrain—has made the helicopter an indispensable factor in almost every type of mission.

The heliborne assault has proved to the quickest, easiest and often the only way to move troops from one point to another in the mountains and jungles of Vietnam. In one massive, well-coordinated movement, an entire infantry battalion can be transported to an objective area in less than an hour.

The scene is a familiar one. Waiting for the combat assault or "CA", heavily laden paratroopers lounge patiently in groups of five or six on the PZ (pick-up zone). The UH-1D "Huey-slicks" land on the PZ for a few seconds, the infantrymen board quickly and the slicks take off.

The slicks circle over the LZ (landing zone) while the area is reconned by observation choppers and heavily-armed gunships. Then as the slicks touch down, the paratroopers leap off and race for cover. Sometimes the LZ is "hot" and a firefight begins. More often it is not and the infantrymen set out to look for the enemy on foot until the next CA. It may come in a few hours or a few days, but it will come.

The movement of an artillery fire support base is another example of helicopter mobility. Soon after an infantry company has CA'd in to secure the new location, the advance artillery party arrives and begins directing in Chinook helicopters sling-loaded with howitzers, ammunition and other equipment and supplies.

Within minutes, the guns have been set up, sighted in and are ready to fire a mission. Within a few hours, the tactical operations center is functioning, communications have been set up, bunkers have been dug and the fire support base is functioning as smoothly as before.

The helicopter is also used in dust off, Snoopy, visual reconnaissance, psychological operations, and defoliation missions. Without a doubt, the helicopter has become the versatile workhorse of the Vietnam war.

firefight

The war in Vietnam has had its big battles, but most of the action comes in company-size or smaller contacts known as firefights.

The firefight, which can flare at anytime during the day or night, usually comes when least expected. At least it seems that way to most infantrymen.

One minute he's taking a break, humping up a hill or crossing a rice paddy, and the next his world explodes into a cacophony of noises which assaults his senses and makes him react immediately.

The veteran and the "new guy" both hit the ground, but the veteran knows what else to do. He gets off the trail or takes cover behind a paddy dike, shrugs out of his rucksack and begins to return fire. He cannot see the enemy, but he knows fire superiority must be gained as soon as possible.

The new guy may not do this at first, but he learns quickly. His squad leader or platoon sergeant sees to that. Besides, he has to; its his job.

Meanwhile the FO (Forward Observer) is on the radio calling in coordinates to the artillery. If the enemy decides to remain and fight from fortified positions, the company will pull back and let the "Redlegs" soften up the area before assaulting. If the enemy flees, artillery will be called in to block their route while the infantry pursues.

If there's to be an assault, the point platoon will move on line and start moving forward toward the unseen enemy. Firing their M-60's and M-16's from the hip, most shout words of encouragement to their buddies and chant in unison. Some remain silent and just move forward with the rest.

It may be an easy objective and last only minutes. But it may be a difficult one and last hours. Snipers in trees and well-fortified, automatic weapons positions make things difficult.

In almost every firefight, someone has to become a hero. Someone endangers himself to knock out a machine gun or silence a sniper, crawl under fire to bring needed supplies or rescue a wounded man. But as they say, it's no big thing, it happens all the time.

The firefight will be remembered as they all are. It gives them something to talk about until the next one.

dust off

The miracle of the dust off, or medical evacuation, is one of the main factors contributing to the high morale of combat troops in Vietnam. The United States has always provided its fighting men with the best medical care in the world and today in Vietnam, it is the best ever. Almost 99 percent of the wounded evacuated from the battlefield survive.

The first man who takes part in the miracle is the combat medic, a unique breed of soldier who is continually risking his life to save those of his comrades. There are countless stories of the heroic deeds performed by these men in the midst of heavy enemy fire. It is the combat medic's job to keep the wounded alive until the dust off chopper arrives.

Without a doubt, the dust off chopper is the main reason why the death toll is so low. Within five minutes of the time the unit in the field radios in, the helicopter is airborne and heading for the unit's location. The aircraft commander usually knows how many wounded there are and in what general condition they are in, so the crew plans accordingly.

The company has usually located a suitable LZ, or if none is available, it cuts one. Sometimes, however, the jungle is too thick to cut an LZ, and a hoist known as a jungle penetrator is used to extract the wounded.

A hot LZ is something which all dust off pilots dread, but if it is at all possible to get onto the LZ, the pilot will do it. Once the unarmed ship is on the ground, the crew wastes no time loading and securing the wounded, and the ship is airborne again in minutes.

The medics on-board waste no time picking up where the combat medic left off, and immediately began treating and diagnosing the patients. This diagnosis is relayed ahead to the hospital so a few more precious seconds can be saved.

The emergency room of the hospital swings into action making preparations for the badly wounded soldier who needs surgery. If the hospital does not have the facilities to handle the case, he is immediately flown to another hospital which can.

After surgery, the patient is sent to a ward for recovery or prepared for further evacuation to Japan. After he is fully recovered, he is returned to his unit or sent back to the United States, depending on how much time he has left in Vietnam.

soldiers of god

Wearing a cross on their helmets, packs on their backs, and armed only with their faith, the chaplains can be found wherever the men of the Brigade are located.

The 173d's seven chaplains provide services daily and are always available for personal problems and religious matters. They are all airborne qualified and Vietnam volunteers.

In the field, they make do with whatever they can find. It is not unusual to see a moss-covered rock or a stack of C-ration boxes become an altar. Their services are simple, but the combat soldier appreciates the quiet reassurance which comes with this simplicity.

These "Soldiers of God" have often served under fire, aiding the wounded both spiritually and physically and are among the finest in the Armed Forces.

fire support

artillery

There will always be disputes between the infantry and the artillery as to which is best, but no infantryman can deny that the "Redleg" is his best friend in a firefight.

Within minutes after calling in a fire mission, an infantry company can have rounds crashing in on enemy positions from a fire support base miles away.

The process begins with the forward observer, an artilleryman who stays with a line company for the sole purpose of directing in fire support. The FO continuously plots the company's location on his map, so when the fire mission is needed, no time is wasted in calling in the coordinates.

The information is received in the FDC (Fire Direction Center) by the radioman who relays it to two chart operators. They both plot the coordinates on separate maps as a double check against error, and give the range and direction of the target to the chief computer.

He quickly computes the necessary angle and direction for the gun crews and type fuse and size of the charge for the rounds. A smoke marking round is fired first, adjusted and then high explosive shells are sent on their way to pulverize the enemy less than five minutes after the fire mission began.

The Brigade receives its direct artillery support from the 105mm howitzers of the 3d Battalion, 319th Artillery. But many 155mm, 175mm and 8 inch guns from batteries under I Field Force have also fired extremely effective missions for the 173d paratroopers.

mortars

In addition to artillery, the infantry commander also has at his disposal 81mm and 4.2-inch mortars for quick and effective fire support.

Known as the company commander's "hip-pocket artillery," the 81's can be humped by the mortarmen with the line companies, besides being used to provide close-in protection at fire support bases.

The "four-deuce" tubes of each line battalion can be used to supplement the howitzers of a fire support base or can be set up in a "mini-base" of their own to provide firepower for isolated infantry companies.

Fire missions for mortars are similar to those of the artillery, and are called in by the 81 and "four-deuce" forward observers who stay with the line companies.

naval support

Since the move to the coast, the 173d has been able to take advantage of the firepower offered by American warships from the South China Sea. They range from destroyers to the mammoth New Jersey, the only battle ship on active duty in the world.

Available for approximately 20 days out of each month, the naval fire missions are coordinated through the naval gunfire liaison officer attached to the Brigade. Working with the Brigade FSCC (Fire Support Coordinating Center) in selecting targets, he adjusts the fire from Hawkeye aircraft or sends one of his Marine personnel out with a ground unit to do the job.

The ships usually fire nightly harassment and interdiction missions, and during the day concentrate on enemy bunkers and basecamps which have been predetermined as suitable targets. The naval gunners can also fire immediate reaction missions when ground forces catch the enemy out in the open.

air support

The aerial fire support available to the Brigade encompasses everything from giant Air Force B-52 bombers to Army gunships.

A welcome sight frequently seen by paratroopers is a small, seemingly defenseless single-engined plane piloted by an Air Force FAC (forward air controller). Armed only with smoke marking rounds, the FAC nevertheless manages to bring death and destruction on the enemy by directing the air strikes from jet fighters.

Attached to the Brigade, the courageous pilots meet the planes from fighter bases at Phu Cat, Cam Ranh Bay, and Tuy Hoa, over the target. There they direct and correct the bombing runs and assess the damage to determine if more air strikes are needed.

Spooky gunships, or C-47 planes armed with six miniguns, can bring devastating fire power on enemy positions at any time of the day or night. Viewed in the evening, the fiery column of solid metal is a beautiful sight to the infantryman and the deafening roar is music to his ears.

With less firepower but greater mobility, the Army's helicopter gunships are most effective when close-in support is needed by ground units. The older Huey gunships and the new sleek Cobras carry 2.75 inch rockets and either two miniguns or a 40mm grenade launcher.

In addition, the extremely fast and maneuverable reconnaissance Loaches or Light Observation Helicopters put their one minigun to good use when they catch the enemy in the open.

combat support

On an average of every three days, each rifle company in the Brigade compiles a resupply list known as a "log" or "firefly" and radios it in to the battalion rear area.

The list contains all the food, clothing, equipment, ammunition and medical supplies the company will need in the next three days. The men tell their squad leaders, who in turn inform the platoon sergeants, who pass it on to the man in the CP who runs the log. The next day the resupply chopper brings everything that was ordered along with mail and maybe a hot meal.

The log is taken for granted by infantrymen, but it is the result of long hours and hard work by the Brigade's support troops. The process begins at the depots at Qui Nhon where paratroopers of Charlie Company (S & S) load their trucks with the supplies and then transport them to the Brigade Supply Office in An Khe where they are accounted for and categorized.

Then they are trucked to supply yards at the forward areas maintained by the Brigade Support Operations Center (BSOC). Unit S-4's requisition their needs from BSOC and arrange to have them transported to the LOC (Logistical Operations Center) in the battalion trains area. Each line company usually has a representative working at the LOC who is responsible for receiving the log from the company and insuring that everything is delivered on resupply day.

TOWMOTOR

the other war

civic action

The main reason American troops are in Vietnam is to defeat the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese regulars, but they are also waging another war. This secondary, but equally important war is being fought against pain, disease, poverty and ignorance.

Termed Civic Action and supervised by the Brigade S-5 Office, its goal is not merely to help the Vietnamese people but to help them help themselves. The idea is for the people to do the work, while Americans supply the material and technical advice. The reasoning is that the people will appreciate much more something they have built themselves.

One of the most successful projects sponsored by the Brigade is the Bong Son Health Workers School and Dispensary, which trains local villagers in medical skills and techniques. Once the monthly class graduates, they go back to treat the people in their own villages and hamlets.

Another major project was the rebuilding of the market place road in Bong Son, which had been a quagmire of mud and garbage. Through the efforts of the local population and 173d Engineers, business soared along the street when the project was completed.

Units of the Brigade have also adopted schools, orphanages, and other institutions, providing them assistance on a more or less permanent basis. The 2nd Battalion supports a Buddhist orphanage; the 3d Battalion, an agricultural college; the 3/319th Artillery, a Catholic refugee camp; the Support Battalion, a Catholic school and orphanage; and the 1/503d Infantry and the 1/50th Infantry, each a village.

In addition, the Brigade conducts MEDCAP's on a regular basis, donates food, soap and clothing to refugee camps, and distributes captured enemy rice to indigent families.

psyops

A peaceful means of waging war, the psychological operations program of the Brigade is managed by the S-5 Office. Using words both on paper and on tape, it is designed to undermine the morale of the enemy and inform both the people and enemy of the government's long range goals.

Most of the psyops effort is devoted to the "Chieu Hoi" (Open Arms) program, which attempt to get enemy soldiers to rally to the Saigon government. Former "Hoi Chanhs," those who have surrendered under the program, aid in recording tapes and designing leaflets, to lend credibility to the messages.

The tapes, which are played from a helicopter, and the leaflets, usually dropped from Air Force planes, emphasize the hardships the enemy is enduring and remind him of the constant danger of death from American firepower. They also inform him that he will not be harmed and will be free to do whatever he wishes after surrendering.

Many Hoi Chanhs become Kit Carson Scouts, who act as point men for the infantry companies of the Brigade. They have been very highly praised for their loyalty and success at detecting enemy booby-traps and ambushes.

In addition, psyops missions are often conducted in connection with civic action projects. By use of posters, movies, tapes, and talks by Armed Propaganda Teams, they explain what the government is accomplishing and try to discover the needs of the people.

the sky soldier

he can be many things—an infantryman, a lurp, a medic rushing to save a buddy's life . . . most often he is young in years, but during his tour in vietnam, he gains a certain maturity which cannot be taught elsewhere . . .

he also gains pride in himself and his unit . . . during his days in jungle school, on his first operation and especially in combat, this pride enables him to endure hardships stoically, fight harder and drive on where others might quit . . . because he knows that he is the best . . .

he rests whenever and wherever he can . .
it might be just a few minutes' pause
during an operation . . . or a three-day
standown in the rear where he might see
a USO show or meet touring celebrities . . .
if he was lucky, he journeyed to phu cat
on christmas day during the truce and
heard ann-margaret sing white christmas
at the the bob hope show . . .
it reminded him of
what he was fighting for . . .

U.S. ARMY

he is an individual with his own strengths and weaknesses,

hopes and fears, desires and ambitions . . .

but success on the battlefield requires teamwork . . . so he learns to function as part of a team . . . but he still retains his unique individuality . . .

he has many faiths . . . they are not always manifested openly, but they are there . . . one of his favorite sayings poses the question—how ya gonna act . . . and he is concerned about how he reacts to the world he is a part of . . .

much of his time must be spent waiting . . . for a helicopter or a plane . . .
huddled under a poncho or resting on his rucksack . . . but he waits patiently . . .

. . . because he knows that
each sunset brings him a
day closer to home . . .